lands which can be brought under vegetative cover with reasonable effort and cost, and which are currently under-utilized and deteriorating due to lack of appropriate water and soil management or on account of natural causes. Therefore, agricultural operations are generally not feasible on such lands at the first stage of development. The Department of Land Resources (DoLR) has the mandate to develop wastelands rather than to convert wastelands into agricultural land and it is implementing the following Schemes for development of non-forest wastelands.

(i) Integrated Wasteland Development Programme (IWDP).
(ii) Drought Prone Area Development Programme (DPAP)
(iii) Desert Development Programme (DDP)
(iv) Technology Development, Extension & Training (TDET). (v) Investment Promotional Scheme (IPS), (vi) Grant-in-Aid to Voluntary Agencies (GIA). (vii) Wastelands Development Task Force (WDTF).

Cost Escalation in Hinduja Power Project at Visakhapatnam

*258. Dr. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of POWER be pleased to state:

(a) the progress of work of Hinduja National Power Corporation coming up at Visakhapatnam;

(b) whether there is cost escalation; and

(c) if so, the steps proposed for early completion of the project?

THE MINISTER OF POWER (SHRI P.R. KUMARAMANGALAM): (a) The 1040 MW Visakhapatnam Thermal Power Project in Andhra Pradesh being promoted by M/s Hinduja National Power Corporation Limited (HNPCL) has been accorded techno-economic clearance of Central Electricity Authority (CEA) on July 25, 1996 at an estimated completed cost of US $ 943.75 million + Rs. 1324.993 crores. Project was accorded Counter Guarantee by Government of India on 14.8.1998. The Company is in the final stages of concluding the financing arrangements from Indian Financial Institutions/Banks and off-shore funding agencies. The Company has invested in purchase of land and the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Contractor has mobilised

resources and completed the ground preparation work to facilitate construction to commence immediately on financial closure.

(b) The Company has submitted a firm financial package to Government of Andhra Pradesh and APTRANSCO with cost escalation due to variation in foreign exchange rate, customs duty and also higher interest during construction. The firm financial package submitted by the promoters will be examined by the Government of Andhra Pradesh/APTRANSCO and the same will be forwarded *to* CEA with their recommendations for approval by CEA.

(c) A private power project being set up by an Indian or Foreign Company has to obtain clearances from State and Central Agencies and has to tie up finances from Indian financial institutions/off-shore funding agencies, Banks etc. The Visakhapatnam TPP is scheduled for commissioning 44 months after the date of financial closure. The project is being closely monitored by the Government of India with the State Government and the Indian Financial Institutions/Banks and assistance is being provided in obtaining necessary inputs/ clearances. The time by which the project is likely to become functional can be determined only after it achieves financial closure.

Use of Religious Places for Political Purposes

*259. SHRI JANESHWAR MISRA: Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the use of major religious places in the country for political purposes is increasing; .

(b) whether it is also a fact that many politicians harass those priests who try to curb their ambitions; and

(c) if so, what action is being taken by Government to prevent political interference in religious places and their use for political purposes?

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI L.K. ADVANI): (a) to (c) As per available information no such instances have been reported in the last three years.